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More Treaties of Obligatory Arbitration.

In spite of the outbreak of war in the Far East, the arbitration movement continues to make steady and by no means slow gains. Four special treaties of obligatory arbitration have been signed within the last five months. The first two of these, the Anglo-French treaty, signed on the 14th of October, and the Franco-Italian treaty, signed on the 25th of December, Christmas day, have already been described in our columns. These treaties, it will be remembered, are identical in terms. Reserving questions of national honor and vital interests, they provide that, for a period of five years, all questions of a judicial order and such as arise in the interpretation and application of treaties shall be referred to the Hague Court.

The other two treaties are between Great Britain and Italy, and Denmark and the Netherlands. The former of these was signed about the 1st of February, and the latter on the 12th. We have not seen the details of the Anglo-Italian treaty, but suppose that it follows closely the lines of that between Great Britain and France. The convention between Denmark and the Netherlands, the last one negotiated, is, according to the dispatches, wider in scope than any of the others. It sets no limits to the kind of questions to be referred to the Hague Court.

These treaties are most important and encouraging from two points of view. They establish for good

and all the prestige of the Hague Court, and they make manifest the commanding position which arbitration has now won. At the present rate of progress it will not be long until the principle is organized into a permanent and, among the important civilized powers at least, a practically universal system. France is already negotiating with at least three other powers for arbitration treaties, and Great Britain and Spain have a treaty nearly ready to sign. A treaty between the United States and Great Britain certainly will not be long delayed. One between France and the United States is reported to be already in the process of drafting.

Wars come and go. They are no longer, as they once were, a part of the regular international order. They are to-day altogether exceptional. But the movement for arbitration, for its organization into a general and permanent system among the nations, goes on incessantly, and is building up an order of things which is to be as lasting as society itself, and which will in no distant future make war, if not totally impossible, at least as rare as brutal personal fights are at the present time.

The Venezuela Decision.

The tribunal from the Hague Court to which was referred the contention of Great Britain, Germany and Italy for preferential treatment in the settlement of their claims against Venezuela, rendered its decision on the 22d of February. The three arbitrators had had the case under consideration since the close of the hearing at the last of November. They seem to have made a most minute and impartial investigation of all the aspects of the case, after listening to the able and extended arguments of counsel on both sides.

The award is unanimous, and holds that Great Britain, Germany and Italy, the three powers that blockaded the Venezuelan ports and were proceeding to collect their claims by force of arms, have the right to a preference of thirty per cent. of the customs duties collected at Laguayra and Puerto Cabello. The litigants pay their own costs in the procedure, and divide equally the costs of the tribunal.

The cabled reports of the award are so meager that it is not easy to get at its full significance. So far as we are able to interpret it, the court does not seem to have made any decision of the fundamental question whether belligerent creditors have in international law and equity any priority over pacific

creditors of the same nation in the settlement of their claims. If that were the meaning of the decision, it would be appalling, as it would tend to encourage just such deplorable and iniquitous conduct as that of the three powers which undertook to force Venezuela to pay claims the justice of the amount of which had not been properly investigated.

The grounds of the court's ruling seem to be that when the three powers raised the blockade and abandoned the collection of their claims by force, this was done on the strength of the promise made for Venezuela by Mr. Bowen that, if they would do this, thirty per cent. of the customs receipts of the ports of Laguayra and Puerto Cabello would be set aside for the payment of their claims. The court interprets this as a specific promise made by Venezuela to the three allied powers, and not to all those having claims against her, the pacific creditors not yet having appeared in the negotiations.

It must be confessed that this position, though based purely on the technicality of Mr. Bowen's promise as it was understood by the allied powers, seems to be well taken. We could wish that the court had decided the more general question, which was generally supposed to be the point submitted, and settled it for all time. But this they have avoided, apparently because they felt that it was not the point submitted to them.

We do not wonder that the award has created surprise and disappointment at Washington and the capitals of the other pacific creditors of Venezuela. But the decision will of course be loyally accepted, and second thought will probably convince everybody that there is nothing in the award when fairly understood to encourage a repetition of the violent course taken by Great Britain, Germany and Italy. Under the award, or in spite of it, we suppose it would be perfectly competent for Venezuela to set apart thirty per cent. of the receipts of any other ports than the two mentioned, and pay this pro rata to all the ten creditor nations without preference. The decision limits the priority of the three allied powers strictly to the receipts from the two ports mentioned.

The claims of the three blockaders, which amount to about two million dollars, will therefore be paid from the receipts of the two ports first. The total claims of all the powers amount to less than eight million dollars. The Claims Commissions, to which was referred the determination of the several amounts, have completed their work, and it is interesting to note that they have found the actual amounts due from Venezuela to be many times, in several cases about ten times, less than that which was originally demanded. The Commissions allowed in the aggregate only about twenty per cent. of what had been claimed. Justice has, therefore, won in the case a pretty substantial victory.

The Russo-Japanese War.

With multitudes of others, we had hoped, and indeed believed, that war between Japan and Russia would be avoided. The risks involved in a war between two such powers promised to be so great, and the multiplied interests demanding peace were so insistent, that it seemed incredible that these considerations would not, out of pure self-interest, restrain them from hostilities.

But in this we have been disappointed. The clash has finally come. Many efforts to prevent the conflict had been made by the peace parties in Russia and Japan, by several of the other governments, by many organizations and by eminent men in various countries. Almost nobody wanted the war — except just a few people who are willing to make money out of human flesh and blood. It has been more universally regretted than any other war that one might mention. But all the efforts to prevent it proved insufficient to stem the tide of political and commercial ambition, of national antagonism and suspicion, and of eagerness for the fray, on the part of the military party in both countries, that pushed them on to conflict.

We are to have, then, a period — longer or shorter no one can foretell — full of passion and hate, of the disasters and sickening horrors of battlefields, of ghastly sea-fights, and whatever else is most horrible and unsightly on earth. We are to witness lands and cities devastated, homes ruined, families broken up, men maimed for life, women and children crushed and left desolate and helpless. The details that have already reached us, from Port Arthur, Chemulpo and the Yalu, make it clear that we are to have a repetition, perhaps on a colossal scale, of the blood-curdling inhumanities of which war is always full. It makes one's heart ache to think of the savagery, cruelty and suffering of it all, whether on the one side or on the other; for both the Russians and the Japanese are men of the same flesh and blood with ourselves, entitled to our love and brotherly interest. They are now at each other's throats, like wild beasts, and any one who possesses the mind and heart of a man must feel pained and humiliated to see the man in them degraded and the beast triumphant.

The causes of the war may be stated in various ways. It is the natural sequel of the China-Japan war:

“For what can war but endless war still breed?”

Ever since that conflict closed and Japan was prevented by Russia and others from establishing herself at Port Arthur and other places on the mainland, she has cherished a spirit of vengeance against Russia and bided her time. She was herself at that time the aggressor, and her spirit of aggression has chafed under the check which she met. Then, again, Japan's new army and navy have figured powerfully